

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

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FM AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 758

S E C R E T GUATEMALA 2009

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"WARNING NOTICE -- SENSITIVE INTELLIGENCE SOURCES AND
METHODS INVOLVED"

E.O. 11652: XGDS-2

TAGS: PINS, SWEL, GT

SUBJ: INTERNAL SECURITY FOLLOWING THE EARTHQUAKE

1. OUR IMPRESSION REPORTED IN EARLIER CABLES REMAINS THE SAME -
THAT IN THE COMMERICAL CENTERS OF THE CITY THERE HAS BEEN LITTLE
OR NO LOOTING.

2. IN THE RESIDENTIAL ZONES WHERE EMBASSY OFFICERS LIVE, THERE
HAS BEEN NO APPRECIABLE CHANGE IN THE NUMBER OF BURGLARY ATTEMPTS.
ACCORDING THE RSO, THE BURGLARY AND ATTEMPTED BURGLARY LEVEL
IN THE AREA DROPPED SOMEWHAT AFTER THE EARTHQUAKE, BUT NOW
IS BACK TO NORMAL.

3. PROBLEM, TO EXTENT THERE HAS BEEN ONE, HAS MOST LIKELY BEEN
IN THE POOR RESIDENTIAL AREAS DEVASTATED BY THE QUAKE - PARTICULARLY
ZONES 3, 5, AND 6, WHERE 70 TO 80 PERCENT OF ALL STRUCTURES WERE
RENDERED UNUSUABLE. OVER 250,000 PEOPLE LIVE IN THOSE THREE ZONES
ALONE. UNDER CIRCUMSTANCES IT WOULD HAVE BEEN EXTREMELY
SURPRISING IF THERE HAD BEEN NO LOOTING OF THE RUBBLE. IT IS TO
GUATEMALA'S CREDIT THAT LOOTING HAS NOT BEEN MORE WIDESPREAD.
NUMBERS OF THOSE ARRESTED OR KILLED ACCORDING TO PRESS AND OTHER
REPORTS ARE LOW IN COMPARISON TO POPULATION INVOLVED AND AMOUNT

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OF DEVASTATION.

4. WE ARE LESS CONCERNED ABOUT LOOTING THAN ABOUT GOG'S RESPONSE TO IT. FORMATION OF NEIGHBORHOOD VIGILANTE COMMITTEES TO PATROL STREETS MAY IN POORER AREAS HAVE REFLECTED REAL NEED FOR GREATER SECURITY BECAUSE POLICE WERE SPREAD THIN AFTER QUAKE, BUT IN SOME CASES COMMITTEES WERE SIMPLY PRODUCT OF QUAKE - INDUCED NERVES (UPPER CLASSES HAD VISIONS OF THOUSANDS OF STARVING LOOTERS STORMING THE WEALTHY NEIGHBORHOODS). RATHER THAN CAUTIONING AGAINST DANGER TO INNOCENT PEOPLE INHERENT IN SUCH COMMITTEES, GOG IN EFFECT ENDORSED THEM, ALTHOUGH IT DID ATTEMPT TO PROVIDE SOME GUIDELINES. FORTUNATELY, COMMITTEES NOW SEEM TO HAVE LARGELY DISBANDED AS POST-QUAKE TENSION SUBSIDES.

5. MORE SERIOUS IS APPARENT DECISION BY GOG SECURITY FORCES TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF POST-QUAKE DISORGANIZATION TO ELIMINATE ELEMENTS THEY REGARD AS UNDESIRABLE IN BEST ARANA ADMINISTRATION STYLE. KILLING OF FURD LEADER ROLANDO ANDRADE, WHOSE POLITICAL MOVEMENT WAS OF MINISCULE IMPORTANCE, IS ONE EXAMPLE. REPORTED INDISCRIMINATE SHOOTING OF ANY LOOTER OR SUSPECTED LOOTER WHO HAD A POLICE RECORD IS ANOTHER. REPUTABLE NEWSPAPER EL IMPARCIAL REPORTED MARCH 10 THAT THERE HAVE BEEN 32 KILLINGS SINCE THE QUAKE ATTRIBUTED TO THE ESCUADRON DE LA MUERTE (DEATH SQUAD), A NAME OF WHICH MUCH WAS HEARD IN THE ARANA ERA BUT WHICH DISAPPEARED FROM THE NEWS AFTER LAUGERUD TOOK OFFICE. IT WAS NOT SO MUCH AN ORGANIZATION AS A NAME USED IN CONNECTION WITH ANY KILLING BY GOG AGENTS. WE STRONGLY HOPE THAT GROWING RETURN TO NORMAL CONDITIONS WILL INCREASE SUPERVISION AND CONTROL OF THE SECURITY SERVICES BACK TO THE TIGHT AND RATIONAL LEVEL WHICH CHARACTERIZED LAUGERUD ADMINISTRATION BEFORE THE EARTHQUAKE.
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